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# On the Job Teacher Training for Native English-Speaking Teachers in South Korean Intensive English Kindergartens

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University of San Francisco

**On the Job Teacher Training for Native English-Speaking Teachers  
in South Korean Intensive English Kindergartens**

A Field Project Presented to  
The Faculty of the School of Education  
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Second Language

by  
Elizabeth Christensen  
September 2014

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine how native English-speaking teachers from Western countries adapt to teaching Korean kindergarten students within South Korea while adapting to both teaching and working within South Korea. To collect data for the study, eight native English-speaking teachers were interviewed about their training and teaching experiences in South Korea. Results show that many native English-speaking teachers desire better communication from their supervisors during new teacher training programs. The participants especially wanted to have a clearer understanding of their supervisor's expectations for them. In the interviews, many of the native English-speaking teachers expressed a wish for additional training and feedback as their time progressed so that their teaching had the potential to further develop. I conclude that more effective training programs and clearer communication are needed to improve the initial experiences of new native English-speaking teachers working abroad in South Korea. Further research is suggested.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### Statement of the Problem

In South Korea, private English education is a booming multi-billion dollar industry (Dawson, 2010). Due to the competitive South Korean educational system, parents are willing to invest a large amount of money to ensure that their sons and daughters receive a top education to secure their future education and career prospects. Learning English as a foreign language is now a required part of a Korean student's rigorous education. Many parents choose to begin their son or daughter's English education at an early age through private preschools that specialize in intensive English programs. These programs usually feature a native English-speaking teacher that creates an immersion-like setting for the students to learn English.

A problem facing many native English-speaking teachers in South Korea is the lack of teacher training. The demand for native English speaking teachers is so high, many schools will accept teachers without any background in teaching (Dawe, 2013). Usually the only requirements for a native English-speaking teacher working in a private South Korean kindergarten are that they are from an English-speaking country and they have at least a bachelor's degree. Therefore, many native English-speaking teachers come to South Korea without any experience in teaching. Furthermore many native English-speaking teachers do not receive very much on the job training or clear instruction of what exactly their jobs entail.

My research addressed this problem through examining how inexperienced native English-speaking teachers learn to adapt while teaching in private South Korean kindergartens. Through taking a deeper look and gaining a better understanding of the problems that native

English-speaking teachers face, future native English teachers will have a better understanding of what to expect once they come to work in South Korea.

### Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this study was to examine how native English-speaking teachers from Western countries adapt to teaching Korean kindergarten students within South Korea while adapting to both teaching and Korean cultural practices. Through this examination, future native English-speaking teachers will have a better expectation of what teaching in South Korea is like and how they can prepare for it. If native English-speaking teachers are more knowledgeable about the teaching environment in South Korea then they can take the time to better plan and prepare to teach abroad.

I chose this study because when I first began teaching in South Korea, I had no experience in the field of TESOL. Although I immediately liked my job, I did experience a few setbacks along the way due to being so new to the field. I also relied heavily on instinct and using many of the strategies I remember my own teachers having used in the past. I had no teaching philosophy and remained unaware of successful ESL teaching practices until I began my Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. Throughout my time teaching abroad in Seoul, I have seen that my experiences as a new teacher in South Korea were not unique. Therefore, I thought that a thorough examination of how teachers learn to adapt to teaching in South Korea could be beneficial to future native English-speaking teachers working in South Korea as well as the administrators of intensive English kindergarten programs.

### Theoretical Framework

In this study, the methodology was guided by the Grounded Theory Method created by Glaser (1968). Through these methods, the analysis and examination of data will determine the

theory so to speak. At the pre-interview stage of the study, I did not know what the participants of the study would say, so I could not assume that the teachers would be working under one theoretical framework or another.

### Significance of the Project

This study offers significant benefits to native English-speaking teachers working abroad without prior education or experience in the field of TESOL. One significant benefit is that it will show how past native English-speaking teachers were successful without previous experience. Another significant benefit is that it will offer teachers' explanations of how they became successful without previous teaching experience.

This study will also benefit administrators and other officials working for private English kindergartens by making them aware of the troubles faced by native English-speaking teachers while teaching abroad in South Korea. If they can alleviate some of these issues by better preparing incoming native English-speaking teachers, it will help their schools become better learning environments for their students. Furthermore this study will benefit students, because it will prepare incoming teachers how to be successful in the classroom. If teachers are not focused on learning the intricacies of their new jobs, they can focus their attention more on the education and needs of their students.

### Proposed Methodology

For this study, I interviewed eight native English-speaking teachers that are currently working in South Korea. Each teacher had at least one year of teaching experience in South Korea. Each participant was interviewed once individually for a period of forty minutes to an hour. Participants explained their initial teaching experiences in South Korea as well as their

current teaching conditions. They also described what they learned through their teaching experiences and how their teaching progressed with experience.

### Definition of Terms

**Foreign teacher** refers to the native English-speaking teachers who are working on one year contracts in South Korea. A majority of foreign teachers are from the United States of America and Canada due to South Korea's preference for the North American accent. Other teachers may originate from the U.K., New Zealand, Australia, or South Africa.

**Korean Teacher** refers to an English teacher that is of Korean nationality. Usually a Korean teacher is in charge of communicating with the parents in Korean.

**Partner Teacher** refers to a common system in South Korea where a foreign teacher and a Korean teacher work together to teach one or more classes. Usually different skill sets are assigned to each teacher. For example, a Korean teacher might teach reading and listening, while a foreign teacher might be in charge of writing and speaking.

**Assistant Teacher** is a classroom aid that helps with the management of the classroom such as giving meals to the children, organizing the classroom, and preparing documents that the students take home to parents.

**Hagwon** is a Korean term that refers to private run academies where students study during the day or in addition to their regular schooling.

**Korean age** is the aging system that Koreans use where a child is already considered one-year-old when they are first born. All Koreans become a year older on January 1<sup>st</sup>, so a one-day-old baby born on December 31<sup>st</sup> would be considered two years old the next day. This is relevant to the study, because grades and classrooms are organized in part by Korean age. For instance, a classroom of Korean aged seven-year-olds is the equivalent of five or six-years-old international



age. At the school where the participants were teaching, the youngest students were five-years-old Korean age. Therefore these students could be as young as three-years-old international age.

## Chapter II

### Review of Literature

#### Introduction

The review of literature is organized in four categories: Kindergarten in South Korea, English Education in South Korea, Teaching Abroad, and Native English-Speaking Teachers in South Korea. Kindergarten in South Korea discusses the experiences and expectations of Korean early childhood education. English Education in South Korea examines the importance of learning English in South Korea as well as Koreans' beliefs about how English should be taught in Korean society. Teaching Abroad takes a look at native English-speaking teachers' experiences working abroad in East Asia. The last category narrows down specifically to Native English-Speaking Teachers in South Korea. This category discusses why native English-speaking teachers come to South Korea, their experiences, and South Korean perceptions of native English-speaking teachers.

#### Kindergarten in South Korea

In the study *Teacher Research in South Korean Early Childhood Education: New Initiative as Childhood Development*, Kim and Kang (2012) interviewed three Korean kindergarten teachers about their experiences working in a Korean kindergarten. The authors found that kindergarten is thought of as an “educational institution” within South Korea so teachers are expected to care for children as well as do “academic activities” ( p. 910).

In Kim and Kang's interviews with the teachers, they found that early childhood educators in South Korea lead a very busy work day that includes developing “hand-made”

classroom materials, riding on the bus daily with children, and cleaning the classroom in addition to their teaching tasks. Moreover in private kindergartens, teachers are expected to “fulfill parents’ expectations” because “private schools depend on tuition from parents” (p. 912). While this study outlined the experiences Korean kindergarten teachers working in South Korea, it does not discuss the experiences of foreign teachers working in South Korean English kindergartens. While the responsibilities and expectations of South Korean teachers are outlined in this article, the expectations of native English-speaking teachers working in Korean kindergartens are not explained.

### English Education in South Korea

In the article, *English Education for Young Children in South Korea: Not Just a Collective Neurosis of English Fervor*, Kyung Eun Jahng (2011) examines the popularity of English education in South Korea. In the article, Jahng asserts that “South Koreans view English education as the fastest, most secure way to achieve upward mobility in social class” (p. 65). This belief has led to the popularity of the English kindergarten in the South Korean private education sector. Since English kindergartens are privatized, they fall under the category of *hagwon* and are not required to follow the national kindergarten curriculum.

In *Hiring Native-Speaking English Teachers in East Asian Countries*, Jeon and Lee (2006) examine the role of native English-speaking teachers in South Korea and other East Asian countries. In South Korea, native English-speaking teachers are usually hired through recruiting agencies that connect native English-speakers to schools in search of an English teacher. According to Jeon and Lee, duties of a native English-speaking teacher include teaching, assisting Korean teachers, and other duties as specified by the Board of Education. Jeon and Lee

make the recommendation that teaching training should be implemented in programs where native English-speaking teachers are lacking experience.

Shin (2012) discusses how change does not come about easily in Korean education in the article *'It Cannot Be Done Alone': The Socialization of Novice English Teachers in South Korea*. The study interviewed 16 Korean teachers in their first three years of teaching English. In the study, the participants discussed the difficulties of implementing new teaching methods or using different materials, because it went against mainstream Korean beliefs about education and language acquisition. If new Korean teachers had a difficult time adapting to the Korean educational system then many new native English-speaking teachers might have also struggled in their new job environment.

### Teaching Abroad

In *A Study of Native English-Speaking Teacher Programs in Elementary Schools in Taiwan*, Luo (2007) suggests that programs with native English speaking teachers should provide the necessary infrastructure for teacher success such as “pre-service and on-going in-service training focusing on collaborative teaching for both NESTs [Native English Speaking Teachers] and non-native co-teachers” (p. 317). Luo came to these conclusions after interviewing three Taiwanese English teachers and three native English-speaking teachers working in Hsinchu City’s NEST program over a five-month period. Luo found one of the major problems for programs with native English-speaking teachers is the lack of training. This caused problems not only for the native English-speaker, but also for the local English teachers working alongside the native speaker. The local English teachers reported having to do extra

work when the native English-speaking teacher was untrained and inexperienced, which caused a strain in the partnership between the local English teacher and the foreign English teacher.

Carless (2006) examines *Collaborative EFL Teaching in Primary Schools* through a study of local and native English speaking teachers working together in Hong Kong. The study found that while overall partnerships between local and foreign English teachers were generally positive, there were still cases of tension and power struggles. Carless states that collaborative teaching can “enable partners to complement each other by drawing out their respective strengths and minimizing their weaknesses” (p. 334). It is suggested in the article, however, that “team-teaching participants are trained and experienced in ELT methods, as well as receiving some training and/or support in collaborative forms of teaching” (p. 335).

#### Native English-Speaking Teachers in South Korea

In the study, “Motivations and experiences of expatriate educators in South Korea,” Oliver (2009) researches the reasons why native English-speaking teachers decide to teach English in South Korea. Oliver interviewed a group of ten educators that work at GIFLE, a teacher training center located outside of Seoul. In one-on-one interviews and a focus group, she found that while all the teachers in the study chose to teach out of a desire to serve, this was not the main reason why these selected teachers chose to teach in South Korea specifically. Oliver found one of the biggest reasons the instructors at GIFLE came to teach in South Korea was due to the competitive salary offered in South Korea.

All of the teachers in the study were experienced teachers. In the focus group and individual interviews, the teachers discussed problems they had adapting to working and

teaching in South Korea. I think this study can be expanded to include the large amount of foreign teachers that come to South Korea without any teaching experience.

A study named “EFL Foreign Teacher Stress in Korea: Causes and Coping Mechanisms” done by Gregory C. Brundage (2007) takes a closer look at the anxiety occasionally experienced by the participants in Oliver’s study. Brundage surveyed 53 native English-speaking teachers working in Jeonju City, South Korea. In his study, Brundage found that most of the participants in his study claimed “their primary source of stress to be at school” (p. 5). The results also showed that many of the native English-speaking teachers who were experiencing stress coped with their stress by drinking instead of finding solutions within the workplace (p. 6).

Brundage’s study could be extended to take a look at how native English-speaking teachers handle their stress in the workplace. Moreover, Brundage points out in the article that further study should include a “look at the foreign EFL teaching training prior to coming to Korea. For example, does a TEFL training program influence teachers perceptions of stress or coping mechanisms?” (p. 9).

In Song-Ae Han’s (2005) study, “Good Teachers Know Where to Scratch When Learners Feel Itchy: Korean Learners’ Views of Native-Speaking Teachers of English,” Korean students’ dissatisfaction with native English-speaking teachers in South Korea is discussed. Han surveyed and interviewed 12 Korean adult learners of English who voiced “distinctly negative” views of native English-speaking teachers (p. 206). The participants’ unhappiness stemmed from experiences where native English-speaking teachers “lacked an understanding of Korean culture, language, educational context and learners’ needs, interests and preferences” (p. 206).

Han’s (2005) article was written with the purpose to help future native English-speaking teachers arriving in South Korea. Han asserts that too much value is placed on the fact that

native English-speaking teachers are native English speakers, but that administrators and employers should be hiring teachers with knowledge and qualifications for teaching:

The quality of teaching is not determined by the teacher's English proficiency alone, although English proficiency is one of the factors that facilitates learning and teaching.

What constitutes quality teaching may involve many factors: teaching experience, teacher beliefs, the match between teaching beliefs and learner needs, broad understanding of learning and teaching contexts and characteristics of learners, etc. (Han, 2005, p. 201)

Han writes that native English-speaking teachers can achieve success more easily by taking the time to understand what Korean learners want and expect from their instructors.

Despite the participants' lack of respect for native English-speaking teachers in South Korea, Han still found there is still a general desire for native English-speaking teachers due to their "'authenticity'" (p. 200). By authenticity, Han means that Koreans want to learn about the cultures of English-speaking countries as well as better pronunciation and conversation skills. One of the participants in the study said, "'I think it's very necessary for the language school to train native teachers properly in Korean ways'" (p. 208). Han takes it one step further and claims that for success in the classroom, both teacher and student must be respectful of each other's culture, which is why it's so important for the native English-speaking teacher to take the first step to understand their students' culture and learning expectations. This study can be expanded to include native English-speaking teachers' perspectives as well as ways that they can obtain the training and proper understanding of their students' learning needs.

Jeon (2009) expands on the Korean view of native speakers as superior to Korean teachers of English in the study "Globalization and native English speakers in English Programme in Korea (EPIK)." Jeon found that native English-speaking teachers are so popular

within South Korea, because there is the belief that the “interaction with native English-speaking teachers will provide students with more English input, a more authentic English environment, and greater cultural understanding” (p. 235). While these may be the hopes and beliefs of Korean parents and English education administrators in South Korea, Jeon found that most “Korean teachers of English and Korean students do not perceive EPIK teachers as legitimate teachers” (p. 240). While native English-speaking teachers in South Korea may have many responsibilities and duties such as teaching classes, assisting Korean teachers, and preparing materials, many of the native English-speaking teachers in Jeon’s study reported that they were there for ““entertainment value”” (p. 238). One native English speaking teacher in the study even said, ““But we’re here as ‘performing monkeys’, like what we do is we stand there, we do a dog and bunny show for 45 minutes. Everybody laughs and giggles, having a good time”” (p. 238).

### Summary

In this review of literature, it has been suggested by multiple studies that many intensive English programs in South Korea should implement a teacher-training program. The lack of teacher training and experience of native English-speaking teachers working in South Korea creates stress for the native English-speaking teacher as well as the Korean teacher working alongside him or her. Korean teachers do not put trust in their foreign co-workers and Korean students do not believe that native English-speaking teachers care about their education. While many native English speaking-teachers in South Korea want to teach and to meet the learning expectations of their students, there are many obstacles standing in their way. Without the proper training, how do native English-speaking teachers overcome the obstacles of inexperience



in the teaching field while also trying to understand the customs and expectations of a new culture to be successful in the classroom?

## Chapter III

### The Project and its Development

This project has four parts that examine how native English-speaking teachers from Western countries adapt to teaching Korean kindergarten students within South Korea. For the first part, I conducted eight interviews with eight native English speakers working in South Korea as native English-speaking teachers. The second part examines the findings from the interviews with the native English-speaking teachers. The third part draws conclusions from the findings. Finally, the fourth part offers recommendations and suggestions about what can be done to prevent the initial conflicts many native English-speaking teachers experience upon arrival in South Korea.

### Stages of Project Development

I grew interested in learning how native English-speaking teachers in South Korea become successful in the EFL classroom, because I first arrived in South Korea as an untrained teacher without a very substantial idea of how to teach. Luckily, I received thorough and helpful training from my first job in Seoul. My training lasted nearly two weeks. In the mornings, I sat down with my supervisor as she explained the expectations of the school as well as how to properly prepare for each class. In the afternoons, I would observe different teachers as they taught their lessons. After a week of training, I was given my teaching schedule and the books for my classes so that I could make lesson plans for the next month. After I completed planning for each class, I brought the lesson plans to my supervisor and we went over them together so she could tell what was good and what needed improvement. It was a long two weeks and my head was spinning with information, but I felt prepared as I went into the classroom during my

first week. After a few days of teaching, my supervisor observed my classes and again she gave me feedback about what was good and what needed to be improved in my classes. My supervisor laid out expectations for me and communicated with me clearly during my training process, which I believe led me to success in the classroom almost immediately.

My experiences do not appear to be the experiences of most native English-speakers arriving in South Korea to teach English. During my first two years teaching in South Korea, I was surprised to hear about the conflicts that other native English-speaking teachers struggle with at their schools, because it was so different from my own experiences.

Then when I started working at my second and third schools, I did not receive as much training as I did at my first job. Even though I had some teaching experience at that point, I stumbled through both jobs trying to figure out just what was expected of me. My initial training was crucial to overcoming these problems in my second and third jobs, but it left me wondering about the other native English-speaking teachers who did not receive training as I had at my original job.

To become more knowledgeable of this subject, I interviewed eight teachers on their first experiences teaching in South Korea. I asked the participants to describe the training they received and how that helped them navigate their first months of teaching in South Korea. For the second part of the project, participants discussed their first experiences teaching in a Korean classroom. Other questions I had regarded what difficulties the native English-speaking teachers experienced as they first began teaching in South Korea. Finally, I asked how the teachers solved these problems and what they believe could be done so that these problems could be avoided in the future.

## Overview of Methodology

Data for this study was collected through an interview process. Each participant underwent an interview that lasted between 40 minutes to an hour. I recorded the interviews and took notes for later interpretation and analysis. The eight participants were selected, because they were all experienced native English-speaking teachers who worked at the same private English kindergarten in Seoul, South Korea. There were six females and two males interviewed from the United States, Canada, England, and New Zealand. All of the participants have at least one year of teaching experience and worked at more than one language school in South Korea. The participants interviewed were between the ages of 25- 33. All participants have a bachelor's degree. Two of the participants had studied abroad in South Korea as undergraduates.

## Interview Questions

During the forty to sixty minute interview, I asked the participants questions focused on their training and teaching experiences in South Korea. In the beginning, the questions were about each participant's background. The participants explained how long they had been teaching in South Korea, prior experience in the field of education, and initial motivations for teaching in South Korea. After covering the participants' backgrounds, we moved on to their first experiences in South Korea. Participants answered questions about what their initial training entailed. Did the participants begin teaching immediately? If they had training period, what was it like? In answer to these questions, the participants described their experiences during their first days of work in South Korea in regards to training such as orientation, shadowing fellow colleagues, classroom observations, and lesson planning. After that, I asked the participants to describe the school where they taught and to recount their first days.

Participants gave details about the initial problems they encountered during the early stages of their teaching, who they turned to for help, how they solved conflicts, and when they began to feel comfortable teaching.

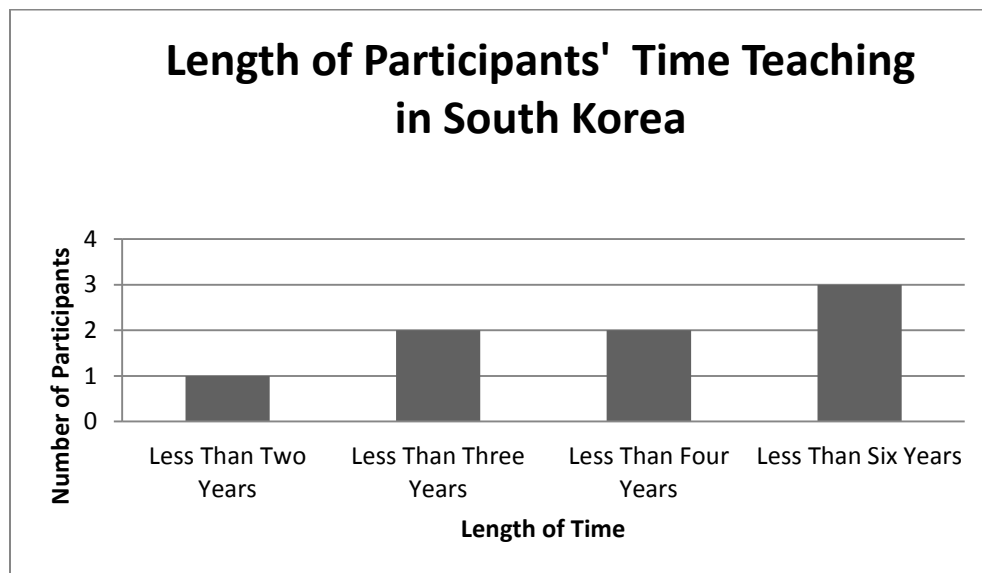
After participants finished talking about their first school, they described their more recent training and teaching experiences. First, the participants described any schools they may have worked at between their original and current teaching assignments. I asked the participants what their first days in the classroom were like at these new schools and if they had made any changes to their teaching style as they transitioned to a different educational environment. After this, we moved on to the participants' current teaching environments. All of the participants had been working at the same school for at least the past four months. The participants gave details about acclimating to their current school and they recounted their experiences training and beginning to teach at their present school. I asked the teachers to comment on their current teaching strategies, how they solved problems, and who they looked to for assistance. Did the participants see growth in their teaching? Had they noticed any changes in the strategies and methods they used in their instruction? The participants discussed and evaluated their current strengths and weaknesses as teachers as well as how they believed they could improve upon their weaknesses.

Finally, the last group of questions asked for the participants' opinions about what training for intensive English kindergartens in South Korea should entail. Did the participants have any ideas or solutions about how to improve training? How did they believe these solutions could assist future native English speaking teachers in their transition to teaching in South Korea? The participants expressed their suggestions and ideas about what they thought training programs currently lacked and in what ways they could be improved.

## Results

### Backgrounds of the Participants

While the main similarity between all of the participants was that they were all teaching at the same intensive English kindergarten in Seoul during the time of the study, there was a dramatic difference in the backgrounds and previous teaching experiences of the participants. One of the first questions I asked the participants was how long they had been teaching in South Korea. As you can see in Graph One, there was a striking variation in the amount of time the participants had been teaching in South Korea. Most of the participants had been teaching in South Korea for quite some time. Half of the teachers had been working in South Korea for nearly three or four years, but another three of the participants had almost been teaching in South Korea for almost six years.

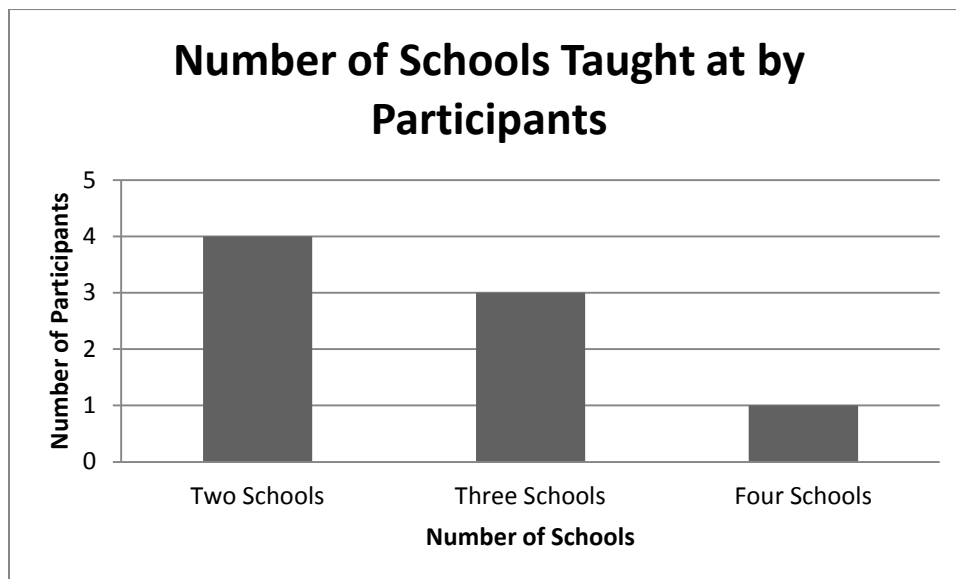


Graph One

Each of the participants had been employed at one or more schools before working at the intensive English kindergarten where they were teaching at when the study took place. Four of

the eight participants were working at their second school. The other four had experience working at three or more schools.

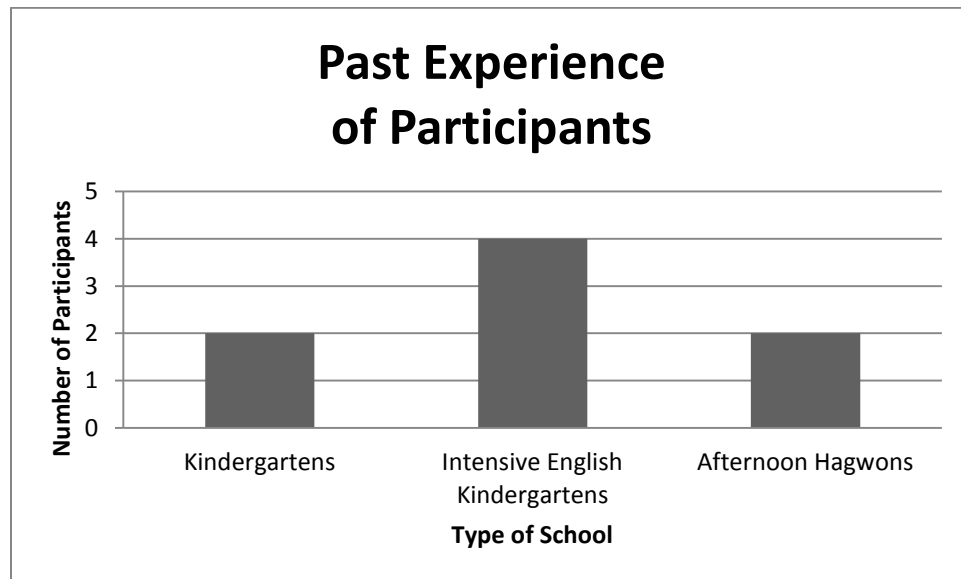
The locations where the participants worked also varied as well. Exactly half of the participants had taught in Seoul for their entire time working in South Korea. Two of the four participants who worked outside of Seoul taught in one of Seoul's satellite cities in the Gyeonggi-do province that surrounds the city. Another participant had worked in Busan, which is the second largest city in South Korea. The last participant taught in a small coastal city in the eastern province of Gangwon-do.



Graph Two

There was also a difference in the kind of language schools that the teachers worked at when they first arrived in South Korea. The majority of the participants taught at a kindergarten, but two of the teachers taught elementary and middle school students at afternoon English *hagwons*. The two participants that worked at a *hagwon* described similar experiences of teaching six to eight forty-minute classes a day.

Although six of the eight teachers taught kindergarten, their experiences were all very different. Only one of the participants taught a singular homeroom classroom. Three of the participants switched between two homeroom classes throughout the day. The other two participants taught different classes and age groups throughout the day. Another difference between the kindergartens was the amount of English taught at the school. Four of the six kindergartens were intensive English kindergartens where the students were taught primarily in English. The other two kindergartens taught lessons in Korean in addition to English.



Graph Three

One of the things I was most curious to learn about in this first group of questions was why the participants had decided to come to teach English in South Korea. Seven of the participants said that one of the biggest factors behind their reasoning to teach in South Korea was for the chance to travel. The word “adventure” was used a lot by the participants when asked about their decision to teach in South Korea. As one participant put it, she desired “a change in lifestyle.”



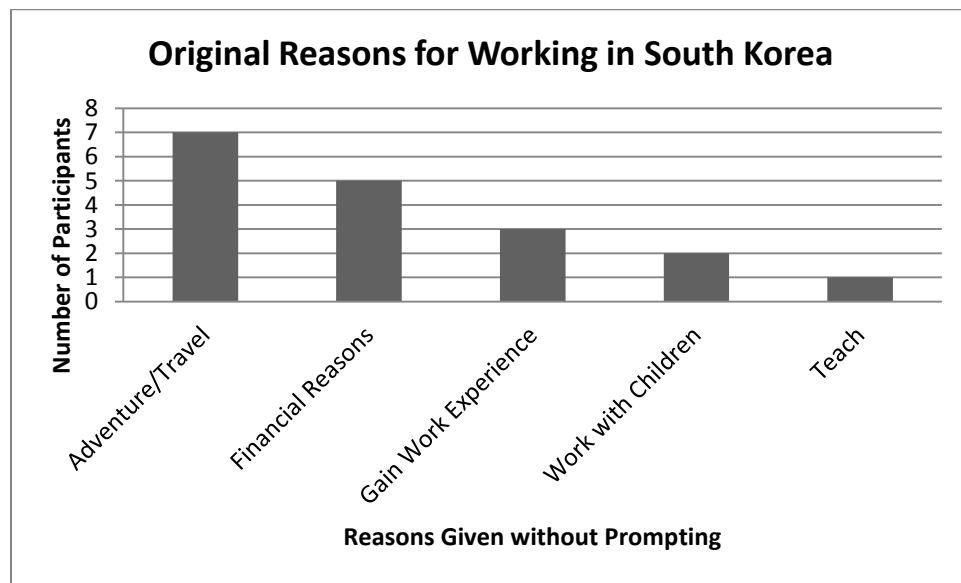
Another reason that many participants cited was due to financial reasons. Many participants were not able to find jobs in their home countries or they were not able to save as much money in their home country as they could teaching English in South Korea. One participant said that she chose to teach in South Korea, because compared to other countries, South Korea had the “highest pay, so it just seemed like a good idea.” Another participant said, “In Korea, I could get a definite job.”

An additional reason for teaching in South Korea was to gain work experience. For some of the participants, teaching in South Korea was their first job after graduating college. One participant said she wanted “something to put on a resume” that would help her find employment when she returned back to Canada. She believed that gaining “overseas experience” would make her competitive in the job market once she returned back to North America.

Only one participant said that part of their reasoning for coming to South Korea was to teach English. She said, “I needed a job, and I wanted to teach English, so Korea seemed like a good place to start.” Although the other participants did not initially give teaching as a reason for coming to South Korea, when asked explicitly about their feelings of working in the field of education before coming to South Korea, they all said that they were at least partially interested in teaching. After being asked about her interest in teaching, one of the participants said, “I knew I liked kids and I had experience tutoring so I thought teaching would be a good job for me.”

Many of the participants viewed South Korea as a good place to begin a career in teaching. One participant said, “I was a youth worker before and I had been considering taking a teaching course when I got the opportunity to come to Korea.” Another participant said, “I

wanted to teach, but I didn't study to teach.” These two participants along with some of the others viewed South Korea as a place to begin teaching without pursuing graduate school or other teaching certifications first. They believed teaching in South Korea gave them the opportunity to see if they liked working in the field of education and if teaching would be something they would want to invest more of their time pursuing once they returned to their home countries.



Graph Four

#### Initial Training and Work Experiences of Participants in South Korea

As I pointed out earlier, the first teaching experiences of the participants varied, which means that their training varied as well. Two of the teachers began teaching immediately without a training or observation period. One participant said, “They gave me books...I was required to show up and teach.” The other teacher said he felt like he was “immediately jumping into the deep end.” Both of these participants said they relied on common sense and the

materials they were given to guide them through their first weeks until they felt comfortable teaching.

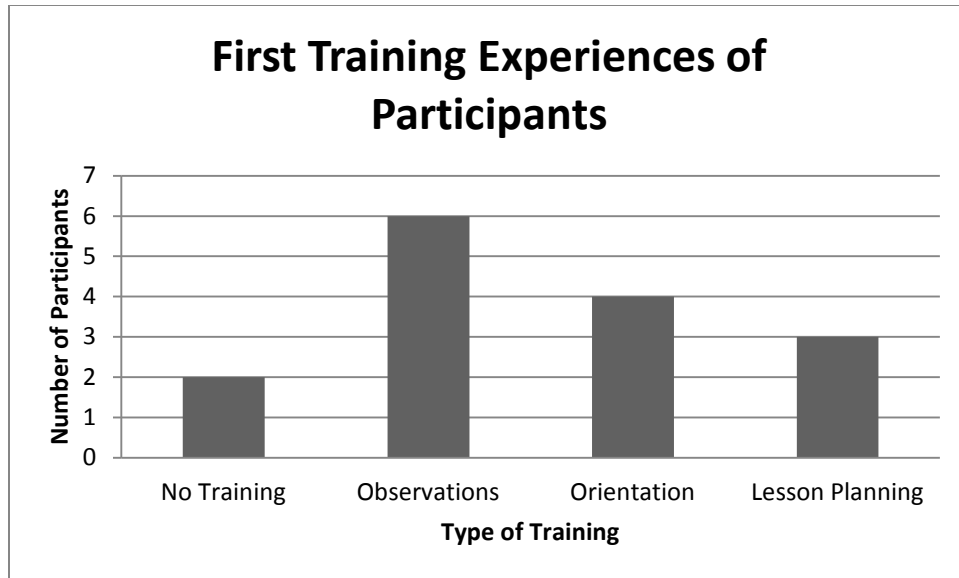
The other six participants spent the majority of their training period observing other teachers. Some of the participants found the observation very helpful, especially when it applied to their upcoming teaching assignment. “I got to know the kids and I tried to copy the teaching style of the old teacher. And I asked the teacher a lot of questions.” Many of the participants who found the observation period helpful said that the outgoing native English speaking teacher was a great source of information for them. Another participant said, “After observing, I followed the former teacher’s lead.”

Some of the other participants found that observation was not that helpful. One participant said she was “watching at the end of the year, which is much different than the beginning of the year” when she began teaching. Another participant said, “I didn’t learn how to teach from watching the old teacher for two days. I learned more by doing.” Both of these participants found that the supervisors at their schools relied too heavily on the teacher observation period as a way to inform incoming native English-speaking teachers about the teaching practices of that particular school. The participants wanted some explanations to clarify and give details about the teaching and classroom management strategies they were observing.

Another aspect of the training period was what most of the participants called Orientation. This was often described as a short meeting with a supervisor or head teacher where expectations such as dress code, punctuality, and other standards of the school were discussed. One participant described her Orientation experience “as a little talk where the bosses go over the rules” for the teachers. Even though, most of the teachers went through an Orientation session,

they were still unclear about the expectations of the school. One participant said she “had no understanding of expectations for discipline or classroom management” after going through Orientation at her school. Another participant said, “I was told three different things by my co-teacher, my supervisor, and the other foreign teachers,” which made the information she learned in Orientation difficult to understand and implement in her classroom.

Many of the teachers were also asked to do lesson planning during their training period. This was one of the aspects that some of the participants found unhelpful during the training period. One participant said the lesson planning “wasn’t realistic,” because “you would just fill in the boxes and there was no teacher’s copy.” Another participant said she did “very basic lesson plans. It was a list in a book used as a reference for the bosses.” In many ways, the participants expressed a belief that the lesson plans they created during training were more for the supervisors and administrators of the school. It was the participants’ understanding that the supervisors wanted the lesson plans for instances where the supervisors or parents had questions about a particular lesson. The participants found this frustrating, because the lesson planning did not help them better their teaching or classroom management skills. “It was such hard lesson planning, just pages of lesson planning, but really it didn’t help me at all.”



Graph Five

A common problem that many of the participants experienced during their first days of teaching was feelings of nervousness and anxiety. Many of the participants expressed that they felt unsure of what they were doing. One participant said she felt “overwhelmed, because there was no instruction” about what she should do. Another participant described her first days as “terrifying... I yelled at the children because I was stressed out and frustrated. I had to learn to be kinder and not be as stressed out.” A different participant said, “The worst part was not knowing what I was doing. My co-teacher was in the classroom, but at first I didn’t want to bother her or anyone. I wanted to find the solution myself. It was a lot harder than I thought it would be. I was basically teaching myself to be a teacher.”

Even the participants that had some experience teaching or working with children encountered some difficulties during their first days of teaching. One participant said, “On the first day, the kids said you look scared. I realized I had to fake it. My youth worker experience helped me a lot those first days.” Another participant said, “I worked with younger kids before,

but I had no experience with older kids. I had to ask experienced teachers for tips about what to do.”

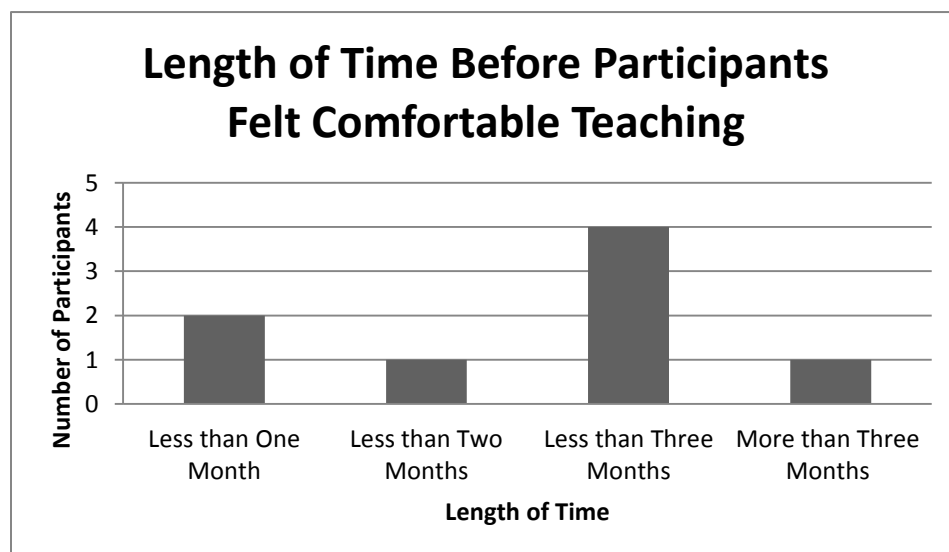
The participants said that it was a matter of time and eventually their uneasiness went away as they become more familiar and comfortable with their new school and surroundings. One participant said it “took a month to realize the children’s age. I had a reality check and then I felt less stressed when students weren’t meeting expectations. I wasn’t so hard on myself.” Another participant said she learned after awhile “as long as the workbook pages were done, the bosses were happy.” A different participant said, “I just needed familiarity. I was just worried about doing things right. Once I had that, I felt a lot better.” For some of the participants, verbal confirmation from their supervisors or administration helped relieve anxiety they felt in the classroom. One participant described her situation by saying, “Once I had an evaluation and I was told I was doing well, I was relieved to know, I began to relax in the classroom.”

Some of the participants said they felt better about teaching once the students adjusted to their new learning environment as well. One participant said, “It was easier when the kids began to understand more.” Another participant made a similar comment: “I became attached to the students. I enjoyed being with the kids rather than stressed out about being in a new country.” Many of the participants described a connection between the times when the students adjusted to the classroom to when the participants also felt comfortable.

For some of the participants becoming familiar with South Korea and Korean culture in and out of their work environment was a key part to becoming comfortable at their jobs. “A month into my time in Korea, I became comfortable. Once I established friends and a community.” Another participant said, “It was hard to leave home, but after two weeks I

adjusted to Korea and that helped me adjust to the classroom and to teaching.” In a similar comment, a different participant said, “After the third month, I felt comfortable. It took a while for me to develop an understanding of Korean culture versus the culture of the individual school.”

Most of the participants felt comfortable within 2-3 months, but for other participants it was faster (as short as one day) and slower (as long as six months). A variety of circumstances helped determine the length of time before the teachers felt comfortable. For instance, two of the participants had already studied abroad in Seoul before they began teaching in South Korea, which they both said helped them develop to their new job faster than if they hadn’t already been exposed to Korean culture. Another factor determining how quickly the participant adjusted to their new work environment was how many other native English-speaking teachers were on staff. Many of the participants working with other native English-speaking teachers reported that working with other people in similar situations helped them build and establish a community faster than those who were the only the native English speaker on staff.



Graph Six

When looking for assistance and advice at their new schools, most of the participants said they turned to their co-workers. In many cases, the participants turned to other native English-speaking teachers. One participant said, “New teachers got information from other [foreign] co-workers, not the supervisors.” A lot of the participants said that working so closely with the other native English-speaking teachers during training helped develop relationships where they felt comfortable to ask the other foreign teachers for help.

In other cases, the participants asked their Korean co-teachers for assistance and advice. This was especially true for the participants that worked closely with one Korean co-teacher. One participant said, “My co-teachers were so supportive. Our school had like a family-feel to it.” Other participants learned a lot from just watching their co-teacher interact with their students. One participant said, “I became more confident about being a firm teacher after watching [my co-teacher].” Another participant said, “Watching my co-teacher helped. I listened to her a lot. She was experienced in child development. We learned a lot from each other.”

Some of the participants also asked their supervisors for help as well. One participant said, “My partner teacher was really dedicated, but very shy, self-conscious of her English. So I went to my supervisor even though kindy [kindergarten] wasn’t her job. As a supervisor, she was more approachable.” Another participant said she went to the supervisors for “clarifications and verbal evaluations, I was making sure. Overall they were pretty good to communicate with.” In general, the participants said that they asked questions to the people they felt most comfortable asking for help.





Graph Seven

#### Later Training and Work Experiences of Participants in South Korea

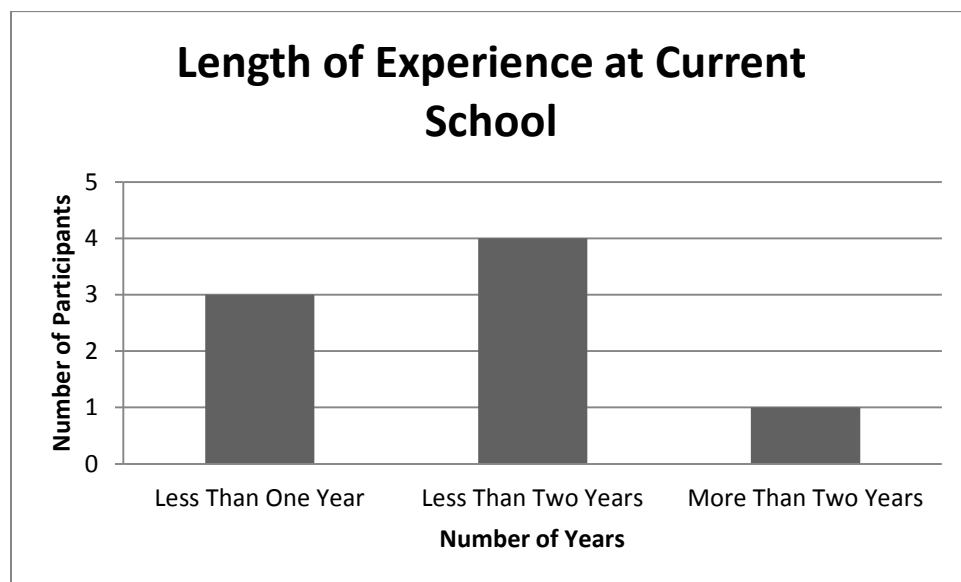
For their second, third, or fourth schools, the participants described the same or similar experiences during training as their first school. Most of the participants' training centered on observing other teachers. Orientation sessions were common as well. For some of the participants, they found that they were bolder or more outspoken upon arrival at their new schools. One participant said she "asked exactly what students should know at [her] second school." A common remark from the participants was their prior experience teaching in South Korea helped them adjust to the new schools where they were working. One participant said, "At my second job, I felt like figured out things quickly. I knew who to ask and what to ask when I had questions." Another participant said, "I adjusted sooner, because I was experienced."

The teachers reported that they did change their teaching style depending on what the school expected or wanted from them. The changes varied depending on the school's expectations. For example, one participant reported they tried to incorporate more fun into their

lessons while another teacher said that they became stricter. One of the participants remarked, “There were definitely different attitudes at the different schools.”

### Current Teaching Experiences of Participants

At the time of the interviews, all of the participants had been working at the same intensive English preschool in Seoul for varying amounts of time. Three participants worked at the school for less than six months. Four of the participants worked at the school between 1-2 years. One participant worked at the school for five years.

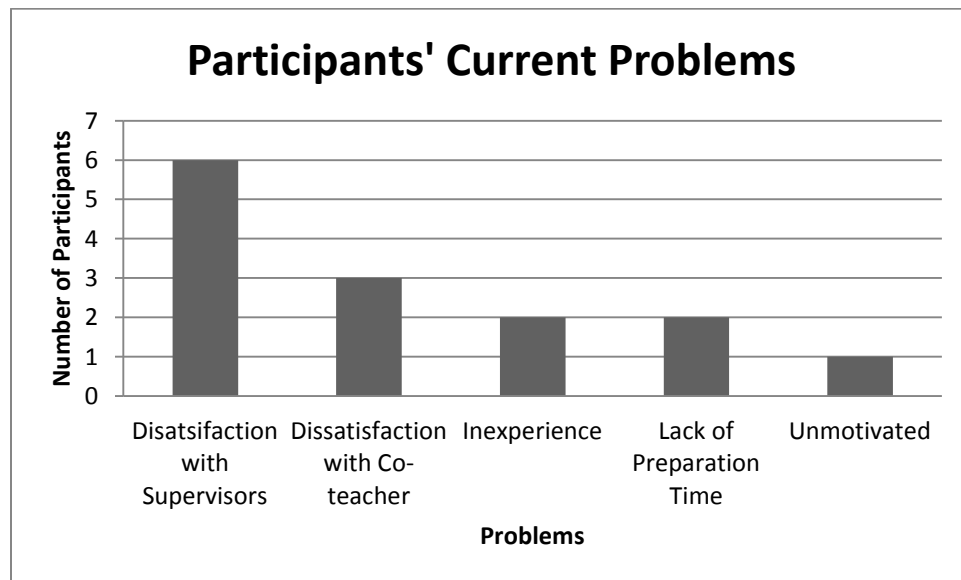


Graph Eight

Due to the differences in the amount of time worked at the school, the problems and conflicts they were experiencing at the time of the interviews were for different reasons. Most of the problems the participants were experiencing were not really problems, but feelings of dissatisfaction typical to any job. Two of the three participants that had been working at the school for less than six months reported that they still felt unsure of what they were supposed to do for certain tasks such as talking to parents or how much they should push the students. “I’m

still not comfortable. I'm adjusting, but the classroom is always changing. We get new students. And I'm just stressed about the students." The participant went on to say, "I don't feel comfortable with the supervisors. They are unapproachable, busy. I always feel like I'm being criticized and judged."

Two of the four teachers that had worked at the school for 1-2 years were unhappy with supervisors due to a change that had occurred at the beginning of the school year in February. The teacher that had been working at the school for five years said she felt feelings of fatigue and unmotivated to better her teaching. She said, "I'm feeling the monotony of teaching. I don't want to repeat myself to children anymore."



Graph Nine

#### Participants' Suggestions for Training in Korean Private Kindergartens

The participants had many different suggestions for how training for Korean private English kindergartens could be changed in a way to help new foreign teachers be more effective in the classroom. While many of the participants found observing other teachers helpful, some

of the teachers found the classroom they were watching to be an inaccurate representation of what they would be teaching. Sometimes the teachers would not be watching the grade levels or class types that they would be teaching so a lot of the information they were gaining in the observation was not useful when it came to teaching. Therefore some teachers believed that supervisors should be sure to schedule observations that are relevant to the new teacher. Another reason that some of the teachers found observing other teachers unhelpful was because they were watching classes at the end of the school year, when they were going to begin teaching at the beginning of the school year. “I was watching at the end of the year, which is much different than the beginning of the year.” One participant thought that showing recordings of a teacher in a classroom with new students at the beginning of the year could prove to be very helpful for teachers who will begin teaching at the beginning of the school year.

Participants also thought better communication is necessary during training. While many of the participants had Orientation during their training period where the school’s expectations were put forth, the participants were still unclear of what was expected from them. Suggestions for better communication included making sure expectations are very clear by outlining what the teacher should do and what the teacher should try to avoid. A participant said the supervisors should be “full-on blunt” during this period to avoid misunderstandings. She went on to suggest that supervisors give “actual situational examples” so that the supervisors can communicate what they expected the teacher to do and what the teacher should not do. Another participant wanted the supervisors to “explain how to integrate students into the school.”

Another suggestion participants had was for ongoing training even after the teachers had gained experience. One participant suggested that supervisors provide “opportunities to watch other teachers throughout the year even after the new teachers have started to teach. You can

always learn things.” Another participant said, “They could give us classroom management training. Some of the teachers here need to learn patience and not to rely on intimidation so much.” Several of the participants expressed an interest in wanting to improve their teaching skills and wished their schools would provide the opportunities for them to do so.

Some of the other participants believed that the recruiting process should be more thorough. One participant said the hiring personnel at the schools “should make sure people have experience and they have good references. Maybe have a trial period where they can weed out the teachers who are not here for teaching.” Many of the participants were of the opinion that if the schools did not want to have thorough training for new and inexperienced teachers then they should recruit teachers who were already knowledgeable about teaching.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine how native English-speaking teachers from Western countries adapt to teaching Korean kindergarten students within South Korea while adapting to both teaching and working within the Korean culture. Many native English-speaking teachers come to South Korea without any background in teaching and receive little on the job training or clear instruction of what exactly their jobs will entail. My project addressed this problem through examining how inexperienced native English-speaking teachers learn to adapt while teaching in private South Korean kindergartens. Through gaining a better understanding of the problems faced by native English-speaking teachers when they first began teaching in South Korea, future teachers will have the opportunity to have clearer expectations of teaching in South Korea.

One research study that helped me as I conducted my own research was *Motivations and experiences of expatriate educators in South Korea* (Oliver, 2009). I found Oliver's study helpful, because the participants discussed conflicts they experienced while adapting to teaching in South Korea in the focus group and individual interviews. After reading this article, I thought that this study could be expanded to include many of the native English-speaking teachers that come to South Korea without any teaching experience.

This study offers significant benefits to native English-speaking teachers working abroad without prior experience in the field of TESOL. This study intends to explain how past native

English-speaking teachers were successful without previous experience in the field of teaching. The study also offers teachers' explanations of why they believe they were successful without previous education and experience. Such explanations can be helpful to new teachers in the field of TESOL, because they can have an idea of how inexperienced teachers in the past became successful.

This study will also benefit administrators and other officials working for private English kindergartens in South Korea through explaining some of the conflicts that are commonly experienced by native English-speaking teachers in South Korea. If administrators are informed of the problems that are commonly experienced by native English-speaking teachers then they can take steps to alleviate some of these issues. This will help their schools operate more successfully and become better learning environments for their students.

Furthermore this study will benefit students, because it will prepare incoming teachers how to be successful in the classroom. If teachers and administrators are given information that will help them avoid problems commonly experienced in the past, more attention can be focused on the needs of the students and how to better improve the educational standards of the school.

By interviewing eight participants that had more than one year of teaching experience in South Korea, I was able to examine how native English-speaking teachers adapt to working in Korean kindergartens. By listening to and analyzing the experiences of these eight teachers, I was able to make comparisons and find similarities between the participants' time teaching in South Korea. This study accomplished an examination of what it is like to train and begin teaching at private Korean kindergartens, which will benefit future native English-speaking

teachers in South Korea as well as Korean administrators and officials by giving them information to help diminish problems commonly experienced in the past.

### Recommendations

In the study, I found that clear communication was what the participants most desired from their bosses, supervisors, and head teachers during their training and orientation periods as well as afterward once they had begun teaching. The participants wished that expectations could be communicated in a way that diminished the chance of misunderstandings. Some of the reasons that clear communication was not achieved were due to language barriers and cultural differences. Other reasons why information was not clearly communicated was the expectation that the native English-speaking teacher would already know the information or they would figure it out by asking another teacher.

There are a variety of ways that communication can be made clearer to incoming native English-speaking teachers. One way is for supervisors to give new teachers a list of what they should do and what they should try to avoid. Another way is for supervisors to give situational examples so that teachers will have an idea of how to act in certain situations.

Another recommendation from the study would be more for more thoughtful training programs that provide information relevant to the incoming teacher. While many of the participants observed lessons during their training period, some of the participants did not find the observations as helpful as others. Those who do not think the observations were useful claimed the information gleaned from observing the lessons was inapplicable to their own teaching. The observations scheduled would be for different age groups, grade levels, or class types that later the teacher would not be teaching. This could be remedied by taking the time to



do effective scheduling or having the teacher watch recordings of lessons that were relevant if was not possible to watch a live class.

An additional recommendation is to help native English-speaking teachers continue to improve even after they have completed training. When the participants were asked what their perceived weaknesses were as a teacher, most of them listed the fact that they were inexperienced and not highly trained to teach. Many teachers also communicated that their growth as a teacher had stagnated at a certain point, once the teachers were comfortable at their new school. Many of the participants said they would be supportive of supervisors taking additional steps to improve their teaching. One suggestion given was continued observations. Some of the participants suggested that supervisors observed their classes and gave feedback about how the teachers were meeting standards and where there was room for improvement. Another suggestion was that teachers occasionally observed other teachers so they could pick up new strategies and get new ideas for teaching.

A final recommendation is for supervisors to take more time in the hiring process to find the right candidate. If on-the-job training cannot be made more thorough or informative, then perhaps intensive English programs in South Korea should start requiring teaching experience and credentials of their incoming teachers. Some suggestions made by the participants in the study is for teachers to conduct demo lessons as part of their interviews. If the lesson cannot be done in person then the lesson can be recorded and submitted online. Another suggestion from the study's participants is for a trial period where the teacher can be let go if they do not meet the standards of the school. This solution, however, could prove to be very time consuming and costly for both the school administrators as well as the teacher since the native English-speaking teacher is probably coming to South Korea from abroad.

I believe this study can be helpful to others in the field of TESOL by informing future native English-speaking teachers and current Korean kindergarten administrators of some of the problems commonly faced by teachers working in Seoul, South Korea. This study can prepare future teachers for what to expect when teaching abroad, while administrators can stimulate change in their educational environments by finding more effective ways to train future teachers.

There are a few ways the research in this study could be improved. All eight participants involved in the study have been teaching in South Korea for at least a year, so many of them found it difficult to recall the details of their training at their first teaching job. One way to make this study more effective would be to interview participants that are new to South Korea and are currently going through training or adapting to a new job.

Another way this study could be strengthened is through follow-up interviews. By conducting more than one interview with each participant, the researcher might be able to observe progress or change in the participant's confidence levels and feelings with their new job. Follow-up interviews might also give time to the participant to reflect on former questions of the study, which might help the participant remember past events or details that could help provide important information for the researcher.

Future studies could also be strengthened by adding the perspective of the administrators of Korean kindergartens. Examining the motivations behind the decisions made about the training for native English-speaking teachers could provide additional insights about strengthening training programs and building stronger communication. It could also shed light on what Korean administrators are looking for in successful teachers for their English schools.

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## APPENDIX

### On the Job Teacher Training for Native English-Speaking Teachers in South Korean Intensive English Kindergartens

APPENDIX A

*Protocol Exemption Notification*

To: Elizabeth Christensen  
From: [REDACTED]  
Subject: [REDACTED]  
Date: 07/01/2014

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco (USF) has reviewed your request for human subjects approval regarding your study.

Your project ([REDACTED]) with the title **On the Job Teacher Training for Native English Speaking Teachers In South Korean Intensive English Kindergartens** has been approved by the University of San Francisco IRBPHS as **Exempt** according to 45CFR46.101(b). Your application for exemption has been verified because your project involves minimal risk to subjects as reviewed by the IRB on 07/01/2014.

Please note that changes to your protocol may affect its exempt status. Please submit a modification application within ten working days, indicating any changes to your research. Please include the Protocol number assigned to your application in your correspondence.

On behalf of the IRBPHS committee, I wish you much success in your endeavors.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

IRBPHS - University of San Francisco

[IRBPHS@usfca.edu](mailto:IRBPHS@usfca.edu)

APPENDIX B

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

**CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT**

**Purpose and Background**

Ms. Elizabeth Christensen, a graduate student in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco is doing a study on how native English speaking teachers from Western countries adapt to teaching Korean kindergarten students within South Korea while adapting to both teaching and teaching using Korean cultural practices. Many native English speakers have come to South Korea in recent years to teach English as a Foreign Language. The researchers are interested in understanding how native English speakers adapt to teaching in the Korean kindergarten classroom.

I am being asked to participate because I am a native English speaker teaching in South Korea.

**Procedures**

If I agree to be a participant in this study, the following will happen:

I will take participate in two interviews, during which I will be asked about my experience teaching in South Korea and the teaching strategies I have adopted during my time working as an English teacher in South Korea.

**Risks and/or Discomforts**

1. It is possible that some of the questions in the survey may make me feel uncomfortable, but I am free to decline to answer any questions I do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.
2. Participation in research may mean a loss of confidentiality. Study records will be kept as confidential as is possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. Study information will be coded and kept in locked files at all times. Only study personnel will have access to the files.
3. Because the time required for my participation may be up to 2 hours, I may become tired or bored.

**Benefits**

There will be no direct benefit to me from participating in this study. The anticipated benefit of this study is a better understanding of the experiences of native English-speaking teachers working in South Korea

and how they adapt to teaching and teaching using Korean cultural practices.

### **Costs/Financial Considerations**

There will be no financial costs to me as a result of taking part in this study.

### **Questions**

I have talked to Ms. Christensen about this study and have had my questions answered. If I have further questions about the study, I may call her at [REDACTED] or I may contact [REDACTED] at [REDACTED].

If I have any questions or comments about participation in this study, I should first talk with the researcher. If for some reason I do not wish to do this, I may contact the IRBPHS, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS, Department of Psychology, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.

### **Consent**

I have been given a copy of the "Research Subject's Bill of Rights" and I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. I am free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. My decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on my present or future status as a student or employee at USF.

My signature below indicates that I agree to participate in this study.

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Subject's Signature

Date of Signature

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Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date of Signature